United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

09-63933 (E) 120110

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Statement

1. The International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, known worldwide as BPW International, acknowledge and recognize the efforts and advocacy of civil society over the past 15 years, especially through women's organizations, in cooperation with Governments and agencies, to realize the objectives and goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As organizations representing millions of women and girls worldwide, we do, however, bring our deep concern that many of the high ideals for the attainment of full human rights and fundamental freedoms as set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have not yet been fully realized.

2. Fifteen years after the Fourth World Women's Conference, some progress has been made for some women. For millions of women and girls in many countries progress has, however, been excruciatingly slow. The ravages of war, national conflict and natural disaster have prevented progress on issues of gender and development. Such conditions have also contributed to the spread of HIV and AIDS, a scourge impacting more on women and children than on men.

3. Recently the global economic recession and changes in climate have reversed progress for the most vulnerable women. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 5.1 million women will become unemployed in 2010 because of the economic downturn — in addition to the 32.6 million who are already without paid work.[1] Climate change will magnify a number of existing challenges to women, as women and children are 14 times more likely than men to be victims of natural disasters in societies where gender inequalities exist; this inequality further challenges the targets set in Millennium Development Goal 3.

4. Both the International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women are aware of the divide between the needs and aspirations of women and girls in underdeveloped as well as in more developed nations. For the achievement of the universal empowerment of women, it is critical that women who enjoy a better quality of life strive for improved outcomes for those who are more disadvantaged. Their struggle must be the struggle for all women and men, regardless of ethnicity, culture or belief.

5. The Beijing Declaration (para. 12) states that the empowerment and advancement of women guarantees both women and men the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations. In 2010, many women and girls are denied this opportunity. Trafficking, violence, sexual abuse, unremitting poverty, homelessness and uncertain livelihoods perpetuate a life of want and discrimination for large numbers of women and girls.

6. Non-governmental organizations working for women's rights have been particularly active in advancing the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Platform. Projects and resources for more sustainable livelihoods, prevention of violence, education and training and improved health in local communities have been remarkably effective. The International Council of Women's development projects, with relatively small budgets, have had a profound effect in increasing family incomes through improved livestock, crop diversification, marketing of farm

[1] ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, July 2009.

produce and training for the production of craft goods for sale. Literacy programmes, funding for educational resources and the provision of artificial limbs have also enhanced the lives of many women and their families. Hope has overcome despair in sustaining social development and social justice.

7. At the meeting of the General Assembly of the International Council of Women in Johannesburg in October 2009, approval was voiced for the greater awareness of gender, economic and social inequalities, acceptance of cultural diversity and growing support by Government and the media for women when they speak out against injustices. Concern was raised that the special needs of older women, disabled women and migrant women were still unmet. Emerging issues caused by the global financial recession and recent natural disasters have brought new challenges to the full empowerment of women. Accordingly, resolutions were adopted recognizing the role of women in caring for their families, the needs of widows, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations, the need for planning for gender mainstreaming by all Governments, for dialogue and tolerance in the process of peaceful conflict resolution, for education and training for human rights, for zero tolerance of rape and for recognition of the negative impacts of commercial sexualization of children.

8. The International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women fully support the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign in demanding a high-level, fully funded United Nations gender entity for women. We see this new agency as a critical mechanism for the future advancement of women and girls. We applaud the decision of the General Assembly to go forward with the creation of this new entity through which, women's rights will finally be accorded the same status and legitimacy as other issues on the United Nations agenda.

9. In societies where the principles of Beijing, the safeguards of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals have been more fully recognized, there are a number of challenges. Violence against women and girls remains at an intolerably high level. Efforts to overcome domestic violence and the abuse of children have failed. Women's economic empowerment and development are essential to the realization of the goals of the Beijing Platform and the principles of the Convention.

10. On this thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, BPW International and the International Council of Women stress the importance of the Convention to women and nations and call on all remaining Member and Observer States to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocol, without any reservations, in order to help achieve the goal of a world where women and girls can live free from poverty, free from violence and free from discrimination, as envisioned in the Beijing Platform for Action.

11. Both developed and developing countries have made substantial progress in educating women and improving their health. In many developed countries, women now account for more than half of the college and university graduates, and many developing countries have dramatically reduced gender gaps in literacy and in the provision of primary and secondary education. There are still significant gaps in the

job opportunities for women and in the wages paid to women compared with their male counterparts; these gaps are even larger in most developing countries.[2]

12. During the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, two parallel sessions addressing the importance of gender budgeting and pay equity in the context of equal sharing of responsibilities were co-sponsored by Permanent Missions with the International Federation of Business and Professional Women. The President of the International Federation officially launched the "Equal pay day awareness campaign" during this time, calling on affiliates in over 90 countries to work with multiple stakeholders, including Governments, employers, civil society organizations and unions, in order to raise awareness of the persistent inequalities of the gender pay gap.

13. There is still very little accountability to women by Governments, corporations and individuals. Women must be included in systems of oversight at every level as legitimate participants in all spheres of public life, as leaders in government, businesses and the broader community. Despite the widespread establishment of national women's machineries, these are rarely well-resourced or politically supported and are therefore unable to influence government policy; women are consistently absent from key decision-making bodies influencing the distribution of resources in both public and private sectors. Gender-sensitive budgeting and policymaking are useful ways to measure progress that will support long-term economic growth as well as improve outcomes for women.

14. We call on Governments genuinely interested in strengthening women's rights and in promoting gender equality to look closely at finance and public spending in order to shed light on the question of how much of it goes to women and girls and how much to men and boys. A gender perspective must be integrated into every stage of a policy process in order to address social justice and to provide equal opportunities for women and men.

15. We note that although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women does not specifically address budgets and funding, it implies that States have obligations in this regard by requiring all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women. It also requires that women be able to participate on equal terms with men in decision-making concerning budgets (see article 7).[3] Thus, where the failure of the State to allocate appropriate resources frustrates effective implementation of the Convention, it has failed to comply with its provisions.

16. General recommendation 6 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women determines that States should establish and/or strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures at a high level of government and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to advise on the impact on women of all government policies; to monitor the situation of women comprehensively and to help formulate new policies and effectively carry out

[2] Keynote address by Her Excellency Chan Heng Chee, Ambassador of Singapore to the United States of America, at the fourteenth Women Leaders Network Meeting, Singapore, 4 August 2009.

[3] See Diane Elson, "Budgeting for women's rights, monitoring government budgets for compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UNIFEM, 2006.

strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination. In other general recommendations, as well in recommendations to individual States, the Committee explicitly refers to the need to take budgetary measures in order to achieve gender equality (see, for example, General recommendation 24).

17. Gender budgeting, pay equity and shared responsibilities in caregiving are closely interdependent. Women's greater responsibilities in caregiving affect their access to equal pay; unequal pay leads to higher shares of women in care work, and gender imbalanced budgets tend to increase unpaid workloads. Strategies taking simultaneously into account equal sharing of responsibilities in caregiving, pay equity and gender-responsive budgeting are urgently needed.

18. In all but a few countries the gender pay gap has remained steady for the last decade, with basic pay for women more than 10 per cent below that of men. The differential is wider when women have attained higher qualifications. Women remain poorly represented in decision-making roles.

19. Women's abilities in peacemaking, in mitigation of climate change and in protection of sustainable environments will be critical to the future of the planet, and societies must be urged to recognize this fact and take appropriate action. Recognition of the needs of girls must be high on the agenda. Their future is women's future. Making sure girls are visible by investing in all aspects of their development will build stronger families and communities.

20. Only by political will, by reshaping all government policies to recognize and mainstream gender issues, and by developing mechanisms to ensure realization of the full potential of women alongside men, will the goals and intentions of the Beijing Platform for Action be fully realized. Let us keep moving forward, recognizing that progress for women is progress for all — and there is no turning back.